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# THE USE OF MASS MEDIA IN RELIGIOUSLY MOTIVATED ADULT EDUCATION: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Robert W. Clyde
Eugene C. Jaberg

October 1970

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON ADULT EDUCATION

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Beginning with definitions of the mass communication process, this paper reviews mass media adult education literature from a variety of sources (social scientists, religious educators, experimental public affairs broadcasting projects, and others) relevant to the use of mass media in connection with group programs stimulated by religious organizations or purposes. Sociological and other works of theory are noted, along with reports on such topics as network radio and television resources, St. Louis Metroplex Assembly, the use of secular films with study groups, and a nationwide 1964-65 questionnaire survey assessing the relevance of religious television programs. Twenty-two references and an extensive bibliography are also included.

# The Use of Mass Media in Religiously Motivated Adult Education
## A Review of the Literature

Robert W. Clyde and
Eugene C. Jaberg

This summary briefly develops the field of interest, then reviews the literature from a variety of sources relevant to the process of directing mass communicated information into the structure of adult groupings , stimulated by religious organization or purpose. Moving through "folk literature" which has developed around particular projects to serve their function or to chronicle them, we are primarily concerned with information dealing with the role of mass media input in the provision of outside reference points to the educational situation, as well as for secondary purposes of contributing to mediating interaction for a particular goal. Literature about message diffusion of all kinds, however, will be drawn upon insofar as it illustrates the general case.

Until relatively recently, mass communication was viewed primarily as a singlestep process in which media messages were directed and presumably immediately affected an essentially atomized, passive, mass audience. It was, as Elihu Katz remarks, an "image of the audience as a mass of disconnected individuals hooked up to the media but not to one another." This approach has been replaced to some extent by religious educators with a model that places emphasis on the role of primary groups and interpersonal relations in the communication process.[1]

Ohliger quotes a somewhat narrower definition of the process:

> When a group of adults meets together on some regular basis to discuss radio or television programs, usually under the leadership of a lay person, sometimes with the assistance of supplemental printed materials....the group is participating in a "listening group" project.

But he goes on to point out that:

> "...(The definition) does not do the approach justice. It doesn't indicate the potential power or dynamism of the groups. After all what we are really talking about is the powerful nexus of the mass media and the small group..."[2]

Harry A. and Bonaro Overstreet suggest that this notion of public education (fostered by the lyceum movement) grows out of the American Revolution and the town meetings of New England.[3]

In 1938, the Overstreets indicated in discussing American's Town Meeting of the Air, that "thousands and thousands of letters pour in daily," and quote numerous letters which suggested that people were gathering in small groups to listen and to discuss among themselves after the broadcast. The Overstreets concluded that the listener "is not content to listen alone... letter after letter from all over America tells of this almost inevitable falling into groups. Even families are welded into discussion units." Indications were that beside family groups, there were resident groups of YMCA's citizens' gatherings in the community church, in Jewish community centers, and the like among organizations that tuned in corporately for Town Meeting of the Air programs. There is some evidence, therefore, that at least some religious groups early saw the educational opportunities available through mass media, particularly radio.

In 1949 Lloyd Morris reported that there were "some 15,000 organized groups meeting to hear radio discussion programs and continue consideration of the topic proposed."4

Sheats indicated that "the staff of the Town Meeting at Town Hall, New York, materially assisted many of the local forum committees in working out plans and procedures for these local broadcasts."5

There also is occasional mention, in the literature surveyed, of the pedagogical potential in radio in some of the writings by churchmen. In 1948, Everett Parker (later to head the Protestant Radio Commission, now director of The Office of Communication, United Church of Christ) included an entire chapter on the educational use of radio in his book Religious Radio. Parker hailed radio as a valuable resource in religious education, even provided detailed "guides" for use of the medium among adult groups.

In general, however, religious groups seem to have utilized more traditional resources in their adult programs, and the writings of the religious educators bear this out. Until very recent years, the literature shows mainly passing references to mass media pedagogical utility. While educative functions of media were acknowledged and suggested as one motivation for religious programming, the notion of "utilization" seemingly appears for the first time in John Bachman's The Church in the World of Radio-Television in 1960.

The last decade has seen great stress of the small group setting for adult education and, among religious educators, there has been new sensitivity to the possibilities of linking study groups with media input. Still, William A. Fore's brief history of religious broadcasting (1967) makes no specific mention of adult listening-viewing groups organized for media education.

The real interest in media use among religious educators seems to have come in the last several years. A relative flood of literature shows much current interest in the media, especially in film, somewhat less in television. Virtually no one seems to see contemporary radio as very useful in structured education. Much of the recent publication provides reviews and ratings of current cinema and upcoming television features, often in a bi-weekly newsletter format. Mass Media Ministries provides a further service, acting

as a booking agent for films available in 16 mm. prints. Arts in Context, published by St. Clement's Film Association, Film Information, a National Council of Churches newsletter, and Media Education, issued by Christian Communications Service in Canada, are among the most useful of many such periodicals in this genre.

1967 saw perhaps the first effort on a nation-wide scale to organize church and synagogue viewing groups for a network series. In cooperation with various agencies, principally the Broadcasting and Film Commission of the National Council of Churches, CBS-TV prepared a four-part series, "Choice, the Imperative of Tomorrow." Catholics, Protestant and Jewish groups all over the country were encouraged through their denominational publications to structure group viewing during the four Sundays of the Look Up and Live series. A two-part follow-up several months later, "Inventing Our Future," focused on forty communities nation-wide, with intensive promotion and study occuring in twelve metropolitan areas of the country. Study guides for each of the programs were prepared and are still being distributed as the programs continue to circulate in kinescope film form. (New York Times, August 30, 1967, p.22. "TV Discussion Series Planned by Church Council and CBS.")

Regional and local efforts at media utilization among religiously-oriented adult study groups are less easily documented, although they surely are occuring. One obvious reason for the difficulty in locating such experiments is that they are not often mentioned in national publications. Two such local experiments in Minneapolis-St. Paul recently utliized public television channel KTCA-TV for adult religious education. Both involved the use of print study materials among small groups which used the televised programs as the beginning of discussion.

At the beginning of the last decade the so-called "Minnesota Project" began to sponsor seminars, conferences, short courses, public lectures, Lay Schools of Theology, "Faith in Life" weeks and other programs. It worked in close cooperation with parishes, community agencies, professional associations and other groups. The project sought to provide platforms to bring the church into active and open confrontation with "the multiple territories of modern life."6

Early in 1956 a St. Louis project, similar to the "Faith in Life" Dialogues, known as the Metroplex Assembly got under way. Using radio as the media instrument, Dr. Eugene I. Johnson developed a campaign on community problems which strongly emplasized the role of the individual stimulated through listening and discussion groups to speak out in existing community structures.7

While a committee was planning a Town Meeting for Twin Cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, during the mid-sixties, a similar group was outlining "Goals for Dallas." The services of the Graduate Research Center of the Southwest in Dallas were engaged to assist. Thirteen writers prepared essays exploring a number of issues. These essays were used as the input for a conference retreat. The output of the retreat was attached to the essays and made available in a paperback.8

Perhaps one of the most useful publications of the above noted Town Meeting was a discussion manual in which forty issues are briefly discussed. A single page devoted to each issue introduces the subject, ten questions for discussion of each issue are listed along with suggested books, magazines and films.[9]

Indeed, current literature shows a predominant interest in film. Since it is more easily programmed than other media for the adult study group (either in the neighborhood theater or with rented 16 mm features) techniques of film use and publication detailing them abound. Stanford Summers and G. William Jones are two churchmen prominent in such publication, and both have written significant recent books: Secular Films and the Church's Ministry, Summers' book, contains much useful material on programming commercially-produced films for adult groups; Jones' Sunday Night at the Movies also provides discussion aids while pressing for a "crash program of screen education" to foster "critical viewing" of both cinema and TV screen. Summers also contributed an article on film as educational resource in the November, 1966 Motive magazine, with the entire issue devoted to cinema and theology.

From the over 200 Hollywood films produced each year for commercial distribution, several are selected for which study guides are prepared so as to be available to the constituency of the American Lutheran Church at the time the film appears in local communities. The guides are published in the Lutheran Teacher, with a national circulation of some 50,000 educator subscribers. Thereafter the guides also are available for individual or quantity purchase by anyone from the Augsburg Publishing House, 426 South Fifth Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55415.

The "scholar" of the film-church discussion appears to be John M. Culkin, S.J., who contributed a substantive section to the 1969 publication Television-Radio-Film for Churchmen. An associate of McLuhan when the latter was at Fordham, Culkin writes about film from McLuhanesque perspective. In fact, the chapter "Notes on McLuhan" (pp. 212-217) will do much to interpret for churchmen the wisdom of the Canadian seer. Other pages deal with utilization of film for group discussion (illustrated by case studies) and present an extremely valuable appendix of annotated film listings, indexed sources of film distributers and a rather comprehensive bibliography.

The same volumecontains sections on television and radio by Peter Meggs and Everett C. Parker, both of which represent valuable recent digests of church-broadcasting issues. Meggs' discussion, in particular, will be of interest. Study of television fare and group discussion based on televiewing he sees as an important part of the church's strategy in dealing with the medium. In one particularly germane section (pp. 75-80) he details a 1967 experiment in television utilization by the Methodist Television Radio and Film Commission. TRAFCO published a Television Valuation booklet, distributed thousands of them to church groups round the nation, suggested a month-long concentration of group and individual viewing, and encouraged critical feedback by providing "critique" postcards to be sent to stations and networks.

An earlier volume in the communication series, edited by B.F. Jackson, is entitled Communication-Learning for Churchmen and includes sections, in terms of our interest, more promising in concept than is fulfilled by the discussion. Print media as well as film and broadcasting are suggested as educational resources, but the discussion does not amplify what is generally suggested in other literature. The most helpful section is William A. Fore's "Communication for Churchmen" which discusses religious communication from a broad, theoretical perspective, and devotes several pages (72-75) to "Mass Media as Education." A. William Bluem's recent paperback, Religious Television Programs: A Study of Relevance reports on a nationwide questionnaire survey of over 430 television stations as to religious program activity during the year July 1, 1964, to June 30, 1965 which sought data on such matters as weekly hours of program time, program types and styles, and subjective evaluations of the value and professional quality of programs used or created by the stations. Syndicated programs appeared to be favored over network offerings; most local and syndicated material was considered either good or excellent, and program quality emerged as the chief criterion in scheduling. The numerous local broadcasts consisted either of worship, inspiration, and meditation (the largest category); programs of religious information, orientation, and education (including those designed for children and youth); and seasonal, holiday and memorial programs, many of which employed music, drama, or dance. Program planning guidelines were set forth on such points as establishing priorities, seeking professional quality, and producing brief inspirational messages and children's programs. The document includes syndicated and network programs, issues of relevance in educational broadcasting, a list of stations, a program index, eight references, and a short history of religious broadcasting.

It is the conclusion of these reviewers that work in this field is generally uncodified in that at this point in time, seemingly there is no "bible" on the subject. This may be partly due to the comparatively recent formalized employment of mass media for religious adult education and the current acceleration of such use. Perhaps the book by Bleum comes closest to being a definitive work although the educational aspect is not the primary thrust.

## FOOTNOTES

[1]A number of essays summarize literature and discuss this emphasis on the sociological. Among the more representative and general are: Irving Allen, Jr., "Mass Communication in the Urban Community: The Social-Relational Sources of Public Affairs Information Levels," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Iowa, 1965; E. Friedson, "Communications Research and the Concept of the Mass," American Sociological Review 18 (June, 1953), 313-17; E. Katz and P.F. Lazarsfeld, Personal Influence (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1955), Part I: E. Katz, "The Two-Step Flow of Communication: An Up-to-Date Report on an Hypothesis, "Public Opinion Quarterly, 21 (Spring, 1957), 61-78; J.T. Klapper, "What We Know about the Effects of Mass Communication," Public Opinion Quarterly 21 (Winter, 1957-58), 454-74; M.L. DeFleur and O.N. Larson, The Flow of Information (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), chap. i; J.W. Riley M.W. Riley, "Mass Communication and the Social System", Sociology Today,

eds. R.K. Merton, L. Broom, and L.S. Cottrell (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1959), pp. 537-78; R.A. Bauer and A.H. Bauer, "American Mass Society and Mass Media," Journal of Social Issues, XVI (No. 3, 1960), 3-66. Also see: M.W. Riley and J.W. Riley, "A Sociological Approach to Communications Research," Public Opinion Quarterly, 15 (Fall, 1951), 445-60; J.B. Ford, "Is There Mass Communication?" Sociology and Social Research, 37 (March-April, 1953), 244-50;J.B. Ford, "The Primary Group in Mass Communication," Sociology and Social Research, 38 (January-February, 1954),152-58; M.W. Riley and S.H. Flowerman, "Group Relations as a Variable in Communications Research," American Sociological Review, 16 (April, 1951), 174-80; J.T. Klapper, The Effects of Mass Communications (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1960), chap. i; M. Brouwer, "Mass Communications and The Social Sciences: Some Neglected Areas," International Social Science Journal XIV, (No. 2, 1962), 303-19.

[2]John Ohliger, "Social Change Through Listening Groups," Adult Leadership, January, 1968. (Ohliger's Ph.D. dissertation yields a bibliography of 443 references on the listening group movement).

[3]Overstreet, Harry A. and Bonaro, Town Meeting Comes to Town, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938.

[4]Morris, Lloyd, Not So Long Ago, New York: Random House, 1949.

[5]Sheats, Forums on the Air , Washington: The Federal Education Committee, 1939.

[6]Minnesota Project Brochure, printed April, 1964, Minneapolis.

[7]Johnson, Eugene I., Metroplex Assembly: An Experiment in Community Education, Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, Boston University, 1965.

[8]Johnson, Erik, Goals for Dallas, Vol. I, Graduate Research Center of the Southwest: Dallas, 1966.

[9]Care of the City, Minneapolis: Social Scinece Research Center, Augsburg College, 1966.

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Many periodicals of the "religious" genre now publish film and media sections in each issue. For a rather comprehensive listing of these and other germane publications and organizations, see pp. 289-308 of Television-Radio-Film for Churchmen, listed above.

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